

No Scissors Required by comfortablynumbonthepuzzle

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

Genre: M/M

Language: English

Characters: Jim "Chief" Hopper, Joyce Byers, Mike Wheeler, Will Byers

Relationships: Will Byers/Mike Wheeler

Status: Completed

Published: 2017-12-08

Updated: 2017-12-08

Packaged: 2022-04-03 05:15:42

Rating: Not Rated

Warnings: Creator Chose Not To Use Archive Warnings

Chapters: 1

Words: 3,127

Publisher: archiveofourown.org

Summary:

Joyce is changing Will's sheets when she finds a tear in the bottom of his mattress. Upon further investigation, she finds he's hidden a notebook, and even though she knows she shouldn't, she opens it, finding some incriminating photos of a certain male celebrity and even more incriminating drawings of a certain male best friend. Joyce knows she shouldn't meddle, but she can't help it. Sometimes a mother knows best.

Angsty but has a (kind of) happy ending.

No Scissors Required

It's 4 pm on a Sunday. As the daylight slips away and with it the promise of a productive weekend, Joyce is attempting some form of damage control.

She's doing okay: she's got dinner on the stove, a load of laundry whirring in the dryer, and neat stacks of envelopes, bank notices, and coupons divided on the kitchen table, waiting to be opened and handled and filed appropriately. She'll get to that, of course. Right after she's had a cigarette.

It's one of those rare afternoons where it feels like the dust has settled, and that she's finally got a handle on things. A small, spiteful part of her wishes Lonnie could see her doing so well. She then thinks of Hopper, feeling equal parts buoyed and daunted by the potential in their future, then, remembering Bob, instantly guilty. She tables that thought for now, but resolves to call the police station first thing tomorrow morning, certain she can conjure up something to be worried about by then. Hopper will know it's a ploy, but he'll appreciate it. He can't seem to work up the nerve to call her unless it's under silly pretenses either.

Will's studying in the dining room. He told her for what, but she can't keep track. Everyday, it's something new, something for "organic chemistry" or "advanced calculus" or "studio art" or "classical poetry" (meanwhile, Joyce herself can't remember ever taking anything but 'math' and science'). She trusts him to handle it himself; is continually amazed by his composure, his perseverance, his seemingly infinite capacity for information and instruction; balks at how much he seems to absorb. School is the one realm in which she won't meddle; the one thing that seems to have stayed the same, even after everything. If anything, Will's become more involved, taking on more responsibility, working harder, longer hours. Still, he sees his friends regularly, and though she wishes he'd spend just a bit more time having fun, she figures it's all a necessary distraction.

She can barely see him over the piles of books and paper, just the top of his head bobbing every now and again, more aggressively when he's erasing a mistake. She feels such strong fondness for him. She

and Will have always been close, and continue to be even as Will and his friends careen ungracefully into adolescence, but still she finds herself, like any mother, wondering: *What is he thinking? What is he feeling? What does he worry about? Is he okay?*

He's fourteen now, in his first year of high school, the same age she and Lonnie started going out. *True, we didn't date consistently until much later*, she concedes, and for the briefest of moments her mind flashes back to Hopper. She wonders, not for the first time, if maybe Will's found himself a- well, not a *Lonnie*.

But she knows the answer. Will spends too much time at home, too much time studying, too much time with her, or Jonathan, or his friends. And even if he didn't, Joyce knows that Will is too careful, too cautious, too used to hiding his feelings. But she also knows it's more than that. Will's never expressed interest in anyone, at least not to her. In fact, as long as Joyce can remember, Will has looked so discomfited at any mention of romance, at any allusion to any sort of love life he may or may not have, that Joyce has stopped bringing it up. She's even considered that maybe he's not interested in that sort of thing at all.

But Joyce knows that's not true. She just knows. And she's tried, albeit in roundabout ways, to address whatever it is that flusters him. She speaks in cautious, neutral terms. She avoids pronouns. She never asks direct questions, instead making statements, testing the waters, waiting for him to agree or disagree. Things like, *she's kind of cute* or *he's got nice eyes, don't you think?* or *I just read in the school newsletter that the Snowball's coming up*. (Normally he responds to her questions with noncommittal shrugs but that one earned her a sharp *so what?*). And, she's not sure why she feels so compelled, but she tells Will she's proud of him as often as she can. She tells him how much she loves him, and how she'll continue to do so forever, no matter what. Still, Will won't budge, and Joyce worries, worries, worries.

The timer on the stove goes off, and Joyce jerks her head towards the sound. The laundry's ready to come out of the dryer.

She's unloading the warm sheets into a basket when she notices a loose thread hanging from the corner. She pulls at it, hoping it'll snap, but it only ensnares more fabric. Annoyed, she begins to

rummage through her sewing box, looking for scissors. They're nowhere to be found.

"Will?" She calls.

"Yeah?"

"Do you have the scissors from my sewing kit?"

There's a pause. "They're in my room," Will calls back, sounding slightly guilty.

"Baby, I thought we agreed you would use your own scissors for art projects?"

"Sorry! Yours are better."

Balancing the laundry basket on her hip, Joyce walks into Will's room, where the scissors in question are resting on his desk atop a nondescript pile of magazine paper scraps. Joyce notes the mess: clothes litter the floor, Will's bed is unmade, and there are open books *everywhere*.

"Will, honey, your room's a mess!" She calls.

"Sorry! I haven't had time to clean it."

Joyce feels a pang of guilt. "I know. I know, you've been working so hard lately."

She sighs, eyeing the unmade bed. Normally, Will prefers to clean his own room. Joyce figures it's a consequence of all his time spent in Hawkins Lab being poked and prodded and examined; that he's eager to preserve his privacy and personhood in whatever little ways he can. Joyce doesn't mind. She indulges him when she thinks it'll help him cope, and knows, secretly, that if not for Will it would probably never get done.

The longer Joyce stands there, surrounded by teenage mess, the more she feels the urge to do something nice for him, for studious, brilliant, thoroughly decent Will, who's studying so hard just meters away. So she decides she'll clean his room, just this once. Because,

she reasons, he shouldn't study for hours and have to return to clutter. Surely he won't mind. She begins to strip his bed of its bedding, replacing it with the soft, warm, forest-green sheets she's just removed from the dryer, taking pains to smooth out every crease. She likes this, trying to make things comfy. It makes her feel most like a mother.

She's pulling the fitted sheet over the fourth and final corner of the bed, when it comes loose on the left side of the other end. Joyce tries to pull it back over the edge, but it won't budge. Frustrated, she lifts the mattress up, trying to get leverage. And that's when she sees it.

There -- inconspicuous, but there nonetheless -- is a long slit cut into the underside of the mattress. Joyce almost doesn't know what she's looking at, until she reaches out and touches it, and realizes that the edges of the crater fold back. She reaches inside, and her hand makes contact with something thick and paper. A book, maybe? Her heart begins to thud as she pulls it out.

It's a notebook. Nothing special. Just a beat-up, spiral notebook with a red cover. She knows she shouldn't open it. She knows it's a violation of Will's privacy, that it would be wrong to trespass like this, that whatever is in there is clearly meant for Will's eyes and Will's eyes only. But Joyce can't help thinking: *What is he thinking? What is he feeling? What does he worry about? Is he okay?*

So she opens the notebook. A stack of photos falls out, scattering all over the cluttered floor.

Joyce curses to herself in a whisper-shout, dropping the notebook, closed, onto Will's bed. She drops to the ground, frantically assembling the photographs, trying not to make a sound. And she's so caught up, and there are so many of them, that it takes a few seconds for her to even look at them properly.

The first one she sees doesn't strike her as odd. It's a black and white photo of River Phoenix, standing on what seems to be a balcony in New York City, looking over his shoulder at the camera. It's a good photo, she thinks, but she isn't sure why it's been hidden. Confused, she looks through the photos she's already collected, then at the other ones still around her on the ground. She begins to notice a

pattern: some are in color, some not, but all are of River Phoenix. River Phoenix with long hair, with short hair, with hair wild and big, wearing wire-rimmed glasses. In one, he's holding a guitar, and his shirt is only buttoned up halfway. Joyce stares at that one the longest. They've all been cut out of different magazines and newspapers (*is this what he's using my scissors for...?*), meaning they'd been collected from different sources, over some length of time. *But why? Why these photos? What exactly does he do with* - And then it clicks, and Joyce knows exactly what she's looking at.

Her fingers begin to tremble. She glances at the red notebook perched on the side of Will's bed, just above eye-level. She grabs it and stares at it for what seems like forever, until finally resolving to open it. What she finds when she does is almost worse than the photos.

What she finds is sketchaftersketchaftersketchaftersketch of a face she knows all too well. It's Mike Wheeler, as animated in Will's drawings as he is in real life, displaying the full spectrum of human emotion. Will has drawn Mike sitting down and standing up, from all sorts of angles, and in a comprehensive range of styles. There's cartoon Mike, for example, the protagonist in what looks like the beginnings of a comic book set in Hawkins High, drawn impeccably in sleek black ink. There are rough, imprecise renderings done in charcoal pencil that smear and blend into one another. There's one particularly impressive full-page pencil sketch of Mike talking into a walkie talkie, his hair wild and big, wearing wire-rimmed glasses. It's not just sketches, though - Will's masterful drawings are interspersed with doodles and phrases written in his distinctive chicken-scratch. Mike's full name is spelled out several times, alternately in cursive and in block letters. And all of Joyce's suspicions are confirmed, all at once.

Joyce can't help it when her nose starts to sting and she feels tears. She's not angry, no. Not disappointed. Not disgusted. Joyce, in this moment, feels a sober sort of pride. She's proud to know that Will feels love, in the same way that any parent rejoices when their child first begins that tricky, exciting ritual. For a few seconds she's reminded how grown he is, how frighteningly close he is to leaving her. But this is what she's always wanted for him, for as long as she can remember. She thinks, horribly, of the times she'd lie awake at

night, imagining a future where Will is happy and in love, praying that it offers him some respite from a world full of Lonnie's. She wonders if Mike knows about the drawings, or the sentiment attached. She figures he doesn't, and if he does, it's probably not because Will told him.

So she's sad, too. She has sensed, from a very young age, that Will was different, and that his path would be a little darker, a little more treacherous. For the first time she really understands that Will knows this too. After all, there's a reason the notebook is in the mattress. It breaks her heart.

"Mom?" Will's voice calls from the living room. Joyce freezes.

"Mom?" Will calls again. Joyce curses to herself, rushing to tuck the photos into the notebook and shove the whole thing back into the mattress.

Will walks into the doorway just as Joyce finishes making the bed.

"Yes, honey?"

Will's brow wrinkles. "Did you change the sheets?" He asks.

"Um, yeah." Joyce says, trying to conceal how hard her heart is pounding.

"You didn't have to do that," Will says sharply. Then, softer: "I mean. Thank you. But you really didn't have to do that. I like doing it myself."

Joyce shrugs. "I know. I just thought you'd appreciate a mother's touch." She's trying very hard to add humor to her inflection, not sure if he'll buy it. Will smiles, forgiving. Joyce wraps her arm around him, kisses his temple despite the eye-roll it gets her, and grips him just a little too tight.

She feels guilty for the rest of the day.

It's 1 am on Sunday morning, one week after Joyce first discovers the

notebook, and the boys are all asleep on her living room floor.

They'd all gone to see *Back to the Future* at the Hawk earlier that night, returning to the Byers' house afterwards to continue the fun. Once the shrieking and the laughter die down, and Joyce feels confident that they're asleep, she ventures out in search of a glass of water. She moves quietly over the carpeted floors, but stops at the threshold of the kitchen. She can hear faint whispering, barely intelligible, coming from the behind the couch.

"I guess I'm just *relieved*," she hears someone say. It's too raspy to know who for sure. "There's a part of me that hasn't accepted that we're finally together after all this time." Joyce knows that voice. That's Mike.

"Yeah. Me too." This voice is weaker, sleepier, and she immediately recognizes it as Will.

Who? She thinks. *Who's together after all this time?*

"...especially because I thought it would never happen." Mike again. *What would never happen?*

"What would your parents think?"

"I'm not going to tell them." *Wait a second. Are they-?*

"Well, yeah. But if you did?"

"Are you kidding me? They'd flip." *Is Mike-?!*

"Really?"

"Uh, yeah. Can you imagine my dad's reaction? With everything that's going on in the country right now? Honestly, some shit is just too weird. Even for Hawkins."

"What about at school? Are we supposed to pretend?" Joyce is frozen, she can't believe what she's hearing.

"Do we have a choice?" Mike says, softly.

"I guess not."

"I guess we have to wait and see what Hopper says." *Hopper?* Joyce thinks, confused. *What the hell does Hopper have to do with anything?*

"Does he want us to call her Jane, or El?"

Jane?

Mike laughs. "She'll always be El to me."

And then Joyce realizes that they're talking about Eleven. *Of course* they're talking about Eleven.

Mike starts to speak again. "But everything will be how it's always been. You know, at school. Nothing's going to change." His voice is laced with something cautious. Will laughs softly, as if trying to bury it, whatever it is.

"What are you talking about? Everything's going to change."

And Joyce swears she can hear the regret in his voice.

It's 6 pm on a tuesday, three days after the sleepover and ten after Joyce first finds the notebook, and Joyce is finishing up a shift at Melvald's.

She feels happy. She's got a lot to look forward to. Jonathan is bringing home takeout from the diner, club sandwiches and french fries, and Will will come home excited and talkative after A.V. club. (And, of course, Hopper happened to stop in today, looking for hair clips for El. He of course played it off like he was overwhelmed, but it was impossible to miss how happy he was to again be participating in the rituals of having a growing daughter. *What about these ones?* He'd asked. Joyce tells him that the ones he's picked, bright pink with acrylic bumblebees, *look a little young for her, don't you think? Oh. Well, you know, it's been a while. Well, you know her better than I do- I only have boys. She does like pink.* He smiles. They smile. *Bitchin'.*)

Will and Jonathan will be home a little later than usual, with Will

coming from A.V. club and Jonathan from work, so she has just enough time before they arrive, Will first and then Jonathan, to set the table and smoke a cigarette in the quiet emptiness.

Their family dinners, infrequent thanks to work and academic commitments, always seem to make everyone happier. Joyce remembers Sunday morning after the sleepover, how Will looked more subdued than usual, how he hugged Mike goodbye somewhat tersely and watched him ride his bike down the driveway until he disappeared, and thinks: *he needs it*.

She waves goodbye to Donald and heads toward the exit. The automatic doors open when she nears, but Joyce stops short at the threshold, staring at the magazine rack.

It's 6:18 on a Tuesday, three days after the sleepover, ten days after Joyce first finds the notebook, 18 minutes after she has what she hopes isn't a *terrible* idea, and Joyce is waiting in the kitchen for Will to get home.

She's standing in a part of the dining room where she knows she can't be seen from the door, watching and waiting for it to open. She's relieved when it does and Will walks in. He kicks off his shoes and sheds his jacket in seconds, and Joyce is warmed by how eager he seems to just be home. "I'm home!" He calls, but Joyce doesn't say anything. Not yet.

Will lets his backpack drop to the ground with a thud and collapses onto the couch. He sits there a minute, idle. *Come on*. Joyce wills. *Pick it up*.

Almost a minute passes, and then Will seems to notice something on the coffee table, something Joyce can't see from where she's standing. His eyes are wide as he looks around, thisaway and thataway, to check if anyone's there. Cautiously, he picks it up.

Joyce smiles. He's holding the latest copy of People Magazine, glossy with newness, with River Phoenix on the cover. *It's not Mike*, Joyce thinks, *but it is something*.

Joyce watches as he flips through it, and when a pink blush creeps over his cheeks, she knows he's reached the centerfold -- a glossy, full-page photo of River Phoenix, without a shirt on, posing behind a wire fence.

And it's perforated. Able to be ripped out of the magazine neatly and cleanly, to be hung up on a wall or folded into a spiral notebook and shoved under the bed.

No scissors required.

Author's Note:

thanks for reading! If you liked this, pls comment or give a thumbs up! Distribution and validation keep the work alive :) Even if you hated it, let me know what you think!

I also envision this as part of a series, so don't despair. There will be more!